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Dancing Through Life: Dance as Physical Therapy to Prevent Falls

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HNRS 4990: Honors Project

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December 6, 2017

Dancing Through Life: Dance as Physical Therapy to Prevent Falls

In this project, I developed several individual exercises to be used in a physical fitness class for seniors who are fall risks. As stated in my proposal, there are several unique concerns that come into play when developing physical fitness programs for fall risks, as well as for older adults. Additionally, there are unique concerns that specifically relate with the P.L.A.C.E. Program, where my ideas were put into action. Below are the observations and reflections made throughout the semester, on what did and did not work.

At the beginning of the semester, I was trying very hard to make my dance exercises combinations set to specific times in the music. This did not work out well, as the participants in the program needed more time to understand the movement or action and begin it. This was my error, as I was focusing more heavily on putting as many types of movement as possible into the exercise, rather than making it simple enough for the participants to do. After discussing it with the leader of the exercise class, I began to simplify my exercises to approximately six-ten movements in each. Additionally, rather than setting the moves to specific times or counts, I lead the exercises with no specific timing. Rather, my goal was to have participants complete a full cycle of the moves two-four times before moving on. This approach left more room for individuals to understand what was going on and begin moving with the group. It also meant there was less for the participants to learn and remember.

For music, I tried very hard to select choices that the participants would like. After observing that many of them enjoyed Elvis Presley, and learning that one participant enjoys Frank Sinatra, I selected musical choices from similar styles and eras, including Chuck Berry, The Oak Ridge Boys, and Frankie Valli. The participants reacted quite well, sometimes singing along or clapping to the beat of the music. The familiar music seemed to put them at ease, and make them feel comfortable. I believe that this was a good plan, and seemed to make the participants enjoy the activities and participate more actively.

When selecting moves to integrate as part of my activities, I began the project trying to use some traditional, yet basic, jazz dance steps as a foundation. This had a varied effect, depending on the dance move. Longer and simpler moves, like arching waves and stomps, were good choices, but cross steps and other more complex moves were not such good choices. As such, I moved more towards simple movements as I progressed, to make them more attainable and less confusing for participants. When picking combinations for activities, I attempted creates sets of movement which gave a full range of stretches for whatever body parts or muscle groups have the focus. Additionally, all of the moves selected were capable of being done on both the left and the right side, to ensure that the workout was equal. This worked well for the participants, who enjoyed the simpler mover, and felt less confused.

Overall, I think that the project was a great learning experience for me—I learned a great deal about how to create a fitness program. The number one realization I had was that I needed to greatly simplify my plans, and that easy, fun movement was better than the complex dance-based exercise that I was used to. I felt that I created a successful series of exercises that could be used to lead a group of elderly people who have been labeled as fall risks through an hour long dance exercise program.

Exercises

- Halloween Sit-Down Stretch (revised)
- Music: Monster Mash
 - Hands lift upward and forward
 - Hands press down and out
 - Stretch down to toes
 - Twist to side and hold
 - Stretch out one leg to side
 - Stretch both legs to side at same time
- Circle Dance
- Music: Runaround Sue (Dion)
 - Partners begin facing one another in circle, helpers on inside, participants on outside
 - Circle right/circle left
 - Travel in to center
 - Do-si-do
 - High fives (right, left, both)
- Sit down dance with scarves
- Music: No Particular Place to Go (Chuck Berry)
 - All participants are given a juggling scarf
 - Catch-and-throw
 - Barrel roll
 - Wave

- Squiggle worm (~~~~~~)
- Twist up (quickly spin scarf in until twisted up)
- Twist down (spin in reverse until back to normal)
- Overhead Arch
- Stand Up Dance
- Love Song (Oak Ridge Boys)
 - All participants placed with a partner
 - Walk forward and raise hands
 - Walk backward and lower hands
 - Big waves at other partners
 - Circles rotating around partner
 - Spin under arm (each partner)
 - High fives with partner (left right left right both)
- Sit Down Warm Up Dance (revised)
- My Girl (The Temptations)
 - Participants are seated and encouraged at the beginning to get comfortable
 - Hand rises to full length, back down with flicks every two beats (left right both)
 - Stomps/marches
 - Hands sweep out/around to sweep, slightly away from chair, and sweep back
 - Heel digs
 - Both hands rise and float back down, (spirit fingers)
 - Walk hands down lap/legs to reach for toes
 - Sway back and forth

- Mindfulness Exercise
 - Participants are encouraged to sit comfortably and close their eyes
 - Let's take a moment to center ourselves—send away all of the stress from the past few days. ****Pause****
 - First, I would like you to find a comfortable, relaxed position and close your eyes ****Pause****
 - Let your head relax, and take a deep breath in ****Pause****
 - Take another, and feel the impact of your breath as it reverberates through your body
 - As you continue to breathe deeply, feel the weight and tension that's sitting inside of you ****Pause****
 - Feel it sink down around you and pool down to the floor wherever you are connected to the ground. Let this pool of tension slide away, sinking down and away from you.
 - And as the tension sinks away into the floor, take a moment to notice the relief that comes with the lack of internal tension. ****Pause****
 - Take a moment to enjoy the freeness and lightness, that ease of breath, with no tension or weight to hinder us.
 - ****Pause**** ****Pause**** ****Pause****
 - As we come out of this exercise, I want you to remember this feeling, of lightness and freeness, and as we go on throughout our week, let's try to take a moment each day to again center ourselves, let go of the tension we are feeling, and move forward with our day. Thank you!